

BEFORE THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Introduction

My name is Samuel A. Adams. I resigned from the Central Intelligence Agency on 1 June 1973. My resignation stemmed from dismay over what I thought was the sloppy and often dishonest way U.S. Intelligence conducted research on the struggle in Indochina. An example of the shortcomings, I believe, was the manner in which U.S. intelligence produced reports on the political and administrative agencies of the Viet-Cong. These agencies, sometimes called the "infrastructure," were the target of the Allied Phoenix program. The Phoenix program was overseen at one time by Mr. Colby, a candidate to receive the CIA's Directorship.

Seven of my ten years at the Agency were devoted to research on our adversaries in Indochina. My reports included an extensive study on the Viet-Cong police system, a treatise on Communist subversive agents in the South Vietnamese Army and police, and an examination of the Viet-Cong's covert structure in South Vietnamese territory. In 1970, I wrote a lengthy study entitled "Guide to a Viet-Cong Province," which the CIA uses as its standard field handbook on the Communists in South Vietnam. For about five years I gave the Agency's training course on the Viet-Cong to CIA case officers bound for Vietnam.

Preface

The Phoenix Program is an example of a sound concept gone awry. It was meant to destroy the Communists' political apparatus, but it has not done so, and the Viet-Cong are in the middle of a resurgence throughout South Vietnam. Although the country's surface looks peaceful enough (at least compared to the last few years) the appearance is deceiving. Beneath the surface of the South Vietnamese government, the unraveling is well along.

The Theory of Phoenix

Phoenix was conceived when the Allies' main weapons in South Vietnam were American warplanes, and heavily-armed battalions whose mission was to "search and destroy." The weapons were bludgeons, which all too often failed to discriminate between the enemy soldier and the innocent bystander. More important, they were virtually useless against the Viet-Cong political cadre, who, it came to be realized, was just as dangerous as the Viet-Cong warrior.

Phoenix was designed to fill the gap. Copied from a British concept which had succeeded in Malaya, the Phoenix Program was meant to replace the bludgeon with a scalpel. The key to the operation was precise targetting. Instead of bombs -- which killed large numbers of civilians in addition to the occasional political operative of the Viet-Cong -- Phoenix's main tools, theoretically, were good intelligence and good files. The object of the program was to find out who among the Vietnamese population were Viet-Cong cadres, and to arrest or kill them. In theory, arrests were preferable to assassinations, because a prisoner could lead to further arrests, and a cadaver led nowhere. In order to work, the Phoenix program had basic needs. These are five of the most important:

1. A clear perception of the nature and organization of the target.
2. Good intelligence concerning the names, the whereabouts, and the activities of the people who belong to it.
3. A tight, well-run police organization, with secure files, with the ability to keep close track of the population, and

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with a high state of training and morale.

4. An efficient and fair judicial system, with stout prisons and a rehabilitation program which could turn rebels into citizens.
5. Most important, popular support.

The trouble with Phoenix, however, and the reason it did not work, was that its needs, although recognized in theory, were never fulfilled in practice. The diverse between hope and reality became so wide that the program degenerated into a game of statistics, in which numbers were paramount, and the object of the exercise -- the crippling of the Communist Party -- was never even approached. I will deal with the needs listed above, and unfulfilled, one by one.

#### The Perception of the Target

When United States troops first landed in force in Vietnam in early 1965, we were abysmally ignorant of the nature of the threat. It was thought that the application of enough military force by the U.S. would eventually compel the Communists to lay off. But they didn't, and the introduction of each new American battalion only seemed to get us in deeper than we already were.

Finally the Tet offensive demonstrated the Viet-Cong's ability to get large numbers of troops into the South Vietnamese urban areas without detection, and jarred U.S. intelligence into the realization that the Communists had something there besides an army. The Phoenix program -- which had existed in one form or another for several years -- began to take serious shape.

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Although the American Advisory effort to Phoenix contained no Viet Cong agents, it often was of questionable help. One of its main shortcomings was the ignorance of most advisors of the Viet Cong target. Prior to August, 1968, the average CIA case officer received no training what so ever in the organization and methods of operations of the Communist structure. Then, in late 1968, a training program started up which by the end of the year gave those bound for Vietnam 24 hours of instruction. This was rapidly cut back. The number of hours in the Viet Cong target now given to CIA case officers going to Saigon is four.

An ancillary problem is the one of population control. Despite many attempts over the last five years, there is still no adequate ID card system in Vietnam, and large numbers of persons, particularly in the slums, roam about without the police knowing who they are. Likewise, the Phoenix system has yet to devise as mundane a thing as a catalogue of fingerprints. If, say, the U.S. ambassador were killed tomorrow, and the gun was found which accomplished the killing, there would be no way to trace the assassin, from the prints on the gun.

#### The Matter of Prisons

South Vietnamese prisons continue to leak, although not as badly as a few years ago. Still, the average Viet Cong captive -- unlike the common criminal -- will likely go free within a very few months. Again, one can point to improvements, but the basic problem remains that the accounting system which comes into play after a suspect's arrest is so loose that it is often very difficult to tell what happens to him shortly thereafter. In several areas of Vietnam, at present, the system has broken down completely, so that Communist prisoners in these areas frequently fail to go to prison at all.

Furthermore, there is an almost complete lack of a rehabilitation system. The old saw that the most dedicated Vietnamese Communists have usually done time continues to have a ring of truth. Captured documents still show that those who leave South Vietnamese prisons frequently rejoin the Viet Cong organization after their release from jail.

#### Popular Support

But the biggest single drawback to the Phoenix program is that except in a few areas it lacks popular support. What this boils down to is the reluctance of the average South Vietnamese citizen to turn in a Viet Cong cadre when he encounters one. Whether the reluctance stems from fear or admiration of the Viet Cong, it amounts to the same thing. That is, the extraordinarily large Viet Cong apparatus continues its covert existence in South Vietnamese territory.

#### Conclusions

In connection with my statement to your committee, I respectfully put forward three conclusions:

- 1) First, the Phoenix program largely failed to come to grips with basic problems, and claimed "improvements" were so marginal as to be of little consequence. Perhaps doomed from the start by built-in flaws, the program's problems were worsened by such shortcomings as woefully insufficient training.
- 2) Second, the game of statistics into which Phoenix plunged allowed the U.S. government to conjure a picture of "progress", which by and large did not exist. In fact the "progress" arose from such factors as the exit from South Vietnam in 1970 of most of the Communist army, and the transfer of large numbers of Viet Cong cadre to so-called government territory, where even today they operate unrecorded by Phoenix statisticians.
- 3) Third, the faulty execution of the program, which was expensive and didn't work, demonstrates once again the need for Congressional scrutiny of the CIA. Until Congress begins to inspect closely what the CIA is up to, questionable programs such as Phoenix.

The initial problem was that the basic research on the nature of the adversary and of his organization was either undone or misunderstood. When the time came to designate a target for the Phoenix organization to aim at the most readily available entity was something US intelligence called the infrastructure, a catchall phrase long used to describe the non-military portion of the Viet Cong organization. Unfortunately, the Communists themselves had no such term, and U.S. intelligence has no precise definition of what it included. It did have a number, however, 39,175, which had remained the same from June 1965 up until the eve of the Tet offensive. Although the number changed after Tet--it has ranged since then from 60,000 to 90,000--the definitional problem was never cleared up. As a result, no one knows even now who belongs to the "infrastructure", and the number given out officially is the sum of the guesses from the field, made by people who have varying ideas of what they are counting. It is conceivable, using the loosely-defined official criteria, that we could say the "infrastructure" was anywhere from 10,000 to a quarter of a million strong.

A salient problem of who to count arose from the fact that for some time the Viet-Cong's covert operatives in South Vietnamese territory were not included in the official lists. Thus a spy in Thieu's office -- there was one -- would be excluded from the "infrastructure" because he failed to fit the official U.S. definition. The problem was compounded because of the reluctance on the part of U.S. intelligence to look into the matter of Viet Cong subversion. For example, in May 1969, the CIA Chief of Station for Saigon indicated on a visit to Washington his belief that the Viet Cong had only 200 agents in the South Vietnamese government. He spoke from ignorance. An in-depth research study going on at the same time suggested the real number of such agents was more like 30,000.

The question of the Communists' covert presence in South Vietnamese territory became particularly vexing after the coup in Cambodia in March, 1970. When it occurred, most of the Communists' army in the southern half of South Vietnam left for duty next door, and large numbers of Viet Cong cadres in Vietnam's Delta shifted from Viet Cong to South Vietnamese territory, often by false defection through Chieu Hoi Centers. The ensuing quiet in the Delta -- along with an apparent increase in the enemy's defection rates -- gave rise to optimism among American officials in Vietnam, including those who manned the Phoenix Program.

#### Precise Intelligence

Although hard intelligence on the names, whereabouts and doings of Communist cadres is much sought after, it is very hard to come by. Allied files bulge with information of this sort, but in the vast majority of cases it is either false or incomplete. Things have improved since the early days of Phoenix when operations against specific targets were almost nonexistent. But the improvements have been marginal, and the latest reports from the field suggest the situation is getting worse instead of better. In any case, the type of person "neutralized" by Phoenix is about the same as it always was; they are mostly low-level and of little consequence. The hard-core Party member is still un-caught.

#### Well Run Police

The South Vietnamese National Police and Military Security Service -- both of which work for Phoenix -- are better now than they were, say, in 1966. But the base was so low that it is difficult to conceive that they could have gotten worse.

The problem here is much more complicated than simply low morale, (which recent reports suggest is endemic among the South Vietnamese constabulary). The most trying aspect of the situation is the Viet Cong's continued penetration of the South Vietnamese security apparatus. Captured documents indicate that many hundreds of South Vietnamese policeman are in reality Viet Cong agents. The penetrations occur at all levels. A government roll-up which took place in northern South Vietnam in 1971 show the dimensions of the problem. Among those reportedly apprehended as Viet Cong agents were the chief of police of Da Nang City. The chief of the police Special Branch, and his assistant for operations, and the chief of police for I Corps. The first three were jailed. The last, after evidence proved